

## SCENE I

At the rise of the curtain, Mrs. White, a pleasant-looking old woman, is seated in the armchair below the fire, attending to a kettle which is steaming on the fire, and keeping a laughing eye on Mr. White and Herbert. These two are seated at the table nearest the fire with a chessboard between them. Mr. White is evidently losing. His hair is ruffled; his spectacles are high up on his forehead. Herbert, a fine young fellow, is looking with satisfaction at the move he has just made. Mr. White makes several attempts to move, but thinks better of them. There is a shaded lamp on the table. The door is tightly shut. The curtains of the window are drawn; but every now and then the wind is heard whistling outside.

MR. WHITE. (*Moving at last, and triumphant.*) There, Herbert, my boy! Got you, I think.

HERBERT. Oh, you're a deep one, Dad, aren't you?

MRS. WHITE. Mean to say he's beaten you at last?

HERBERT. Certainly not! Why he's overlooked —

MR. WHITE. (*Very excited.*) I see it! Lemme have that back!

HERBERT. Not much. Rules of the game!

MR. WHITE. (*Disgusted.*) I don't hold with them scientific rules. You turn what ought to be an innocent relaxation —

MRS. WHITE. Don't talk so much, Father. You put him off.

HERBERT. (*Laughing.*) Not he!

MR. WHITE. (*Trying to distract his attention.*) Listen to the wind.

HERBERT. (*Drily.*) Ah! I'm listening. Check.

MR. WHITE. (*Still trying to distract him.*) I should hardly think Sergeant-Major Morris'd come tonight.

HERBERT. Mate. (*Rises.*)

MR. WHITE. (*With an outbreak of disgust and sweeping the chessmen off the board.*) That's the worst of living so far out. Your friends can't come for a quiet chat, and you addle your brains over a confounded —

HERBERT. Now, Father! Morris'll turn up all right.

MR. WHITE. (*Still in a temper.*) Lover's Lane, Fulham! Ho! Of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in! Pathway's a swamp and the road's a torrent. What's the County Council thinking of, that's what I

want to know? Because this is the only house in the road it doesn't matter if nobody can get near it, I s'pose.

MRS. WHITE. Never mind, dear. Perhaps you'll win tomorrow.

MR. WHITE. Perhaps I'll—perhaps I'll—I What d'you mean? (Bursts out laughing.) There! You always know what's going on inside of me, don't you, Mother?

MRS. WHITE. Ought to, after thirty years, John. (She goes to dresser, and busies herself wiping tumblers on tray there.)

HERBERT. (Rises, goes to fireplace and lights pipe.) And it's not such a bad place, Dad, after all. One of the few old-fashioned houses left near London. None o' your stucco villas. Homelike, I call it. And so do you, or you wouldn't have bought it.

MR. WHITE. (Growling.) Nice job I made of that too! With two hundred pounds owing on it.

HERBERT. Why, I shall work that off in no time, Dad. Matter of three years with the increase promised me.

MR. WHITE. If you don't get married.

HERBERT. Not me. Not that sort.

MRS. WHITE. I wish you would, Herbert. A good, steady lad—

(She brings the tray with a bottle of whisky, glasses, a lemon, spoons, cake, and a knife to the table.)

HERBERT. Lots of time, Mother. Sufficient for the day—as the saying goes. Just now my dynamos don't leave me any time for love-making. Jealous they are, I tell you!

MR. WHITE. (Chuckling.) I lay awake at night often, and think: If Herbert took a nap, and let his what-d'you-call-ums—dynamos, run down, all Fulham would be in darkness. What a joke!

HERBERT. Joke! And me fired! Pretty idea of a joke you've got, I don't think.

(Knock at outer door.)

MRS. WHITE. Listen!

(Knock repeated, louder.)

MR. WHITE. (Going toward door.) That's him. That's the Sergeant-Major. (He unlocks door.)

HERBERT. (Removes chessboard.) Wonder what yarn he's got for us tonight. MRS. WHITE. Don't let the door slam, John!

(Mr. White opens the door a little, struggling with it. Wind. Sergeant-Major Morris, a veteran with a distinct will—)

gone — is seen to enter. Mr. White helps him off with his coat, which he hangs up in the outer hall.)

MR. WHITE. Slip in quick! It's as much as I can do to hold it against the wind. SERGEANT. Awful! Awful! (Busy taking off his cloak.) And a mile up the road by the cemetery — it's worse. Enough to blow the hair off your head.

MR. WHITE. Give me your stick.

SERGEANT. If it wasn't I knew what a welcome I'd get —

MR. WHITE. (Preceding him into the room.) Sergeant-Major Morris!

MRS. WHITE. Tut! tut! So cold you must be! Come to the fire.

SERGEANT. How are you, ma'am? (To Herbert.) How's yourself, Laddie? Not on duty yet, eh? Day week, eh?

HERBERT. No, sir. Night week. But there's half an hour yet.

SERGEANT. (Sitting in the armchair above the fire, which Mrs. White is motioning him toward.) Thank you kindly, ma'am. That's good! That's a sight better than the trenches at Chitral. That's better than sitting in a puddle with the rain pouring down in buckets, and the natives taking pot shots at you.

MRS. WHITE. Didn't you have no umbrellas? (She stirs the fire.) SERGEANT. Umbrell — ? Hol hol That's good! Eh, White? That's good. Did you hear what she said? Umbrellas! And goloshes! and hot water bottles! Oh, yes! No offense, ma'am, but it's easy to see you was never a soldier. HERBERT. (Rather hurt.) Mother spoke out of kindness, sir.

SERGEANT. And well I know it; and no offense intended. No, ma'am, hard-ship, hardship is the soldier's lot. Starvation, fever, and get yourself shot. MRS. WHITE. You don't look to've taken much harm — except — (Indicates his empty sleeve. She takes kettle to table.)

SERGEANT. (Showing a medal hidden under his coat.) And that I got this for. No, ma'am. Tough. Thomas Morris is tough.

MR. WHITE. (Holding a glass under the Sergeant's nose.) Put your nose into this.

SERGEANT. Whisky? And hot? And sugar? And a slice of lemon? No. I said I'd never, but seeing the sort of night. Well! (Waving the glass at them.) Here's another thousand a year!

MR. WHITE. (Also with a glass.) Same to you, and many of them.

SERGEANT. (To Herbert, who has no glass.) What? Not you?

HERBERT. (Laughing.) Oh! it isn't for want of being sociable. But my work don't go with it. Not if it was ever so little. I've got to keep a cool head, a steady eye, and a still hand. The fly wheel might gobble me up.

MRS. WHITE. Don't, Herbert.  
 HERBERT. (Laughing.) No fear, Mother.  
 SERGEANT. Ah! you electricians! Sort of magicians, you are. Light! says you, and light it is. And, power! says you, and the trams go whizzing. And, knowledge! says you, and words go humming to the ends of the world. It fair beats me, and I've seen a bit in my time, too.  
 HERBERT. (Nudges his father.) Your Indian magic? All a fake, governor. The fakir's fake.

SERGEANT. Fake, you call it? I tell you, I've seen it.

HERBERT. Oh, come, now! Such as what? Come, now!

SERGEANT. I've seen a fellow with no more clothes on than a baby, if you know what I mean, take an empty basket—empty, mind! as empty as—as this here glass—

MRS. WHITE. Hand it over, Morris. (Hands it to Herbert, who goes quickly above table and fills it.)

SERGEANT. Which was not my intentions, but used for illustration.

HERBERT. (While mixing.) Oh, I've seen the basket trick! and I've read how it was done. Why, I could do it myself, with a bit of practice. Ladle out something stronger. (Brings him the glass.)

SERGEANT. Stronger? What do you say to an old fakir chucking a rope up in the air, in the air, mind you!—and swarming up it, as if it was hooked on, and vanishing clean out of sight? I've seen that.

Herbert goes to table, plunges a knife into a piece of cake and offers it to the Sergeant with exaggerated politeness.

SERGEANT. (Eyeing it with disgust.) Cake? What for?  
 HERBERT. That yarn takes it.

(Mr. and Mrs. White delighted.)

SERGEANT. Mean to say you doubt my word?

MRS. WHITE. No, no! He's only teasing you. You shouldn't, Herbert.

MRS. WHITE. Herbert always was one for a bit of fun!

SERGEANT. But it's true. Why, if I chose, I could tell you things—But there! you don't get no more yarns out of me.

MRS. WHITE. Nonsense, old friend. You're not going to get sticky about a bit of fun. What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw, or something? (Nudges Herbert and winks at Mrs. White.)

SERGEANT. (Gravely.) Nothing. Leastways, nothing worth hearing.

MRS. WHITE. (*With astonished curiosity.*) Monkey's paw —?

MR. WHITE. Ah—you was telling me —

SERGEANT. Nothing. Don't go on about it. (*Puts his empty glass to his lips, then stares at it.*) What? Empty again? There! When I begin thinking of the paw, it makes me that absent-minded.

MR. WHITE. (*Rises and fills glass.*) You said you always carried it on you.

SERGEANT. So I do, for fear of what might happen. (*Sunk in thought.*) Ay; —ay!

MR. WHITE. (*Handing him his glass refilled.*) There.

MRS. WHITE. What's it for?

SERGEANT. You wouldn't believe me, if I was to tell you.

HERBERT. I will, every word.

SERGEANT. Magic, then! Don't you laugh!

HERBERT. I'm not. Got it on you now?

SERGEANT. Of course.

HERBERT. Let's see it.

SERGEANT. Oh, it's nothing to look at. (*Hunting in his pocket.*) Just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy. (*Produces it and holds it toward Mrs.*

*White.*) Here.

MRS. WHITE. (*Who has leaned forward eagerly to see it, starts back with a*

*little cry of disgust.*) Oh!

HERBERT. Give us a look. (*Morris passes the paw to Mr. White, from whom*

*Herbert takes it.*) Why, it's all dried up!

SERGEANT. I said so.

(*Wind.*)

MRS. WHITE. (*With a slight shudder.*) Listen to the wind!

MR. WHITE. (*Taking the paw from Herbert.*) And what might there be special

about it?

SERGEANT. (*Impressively.*) That there paw has had a spell put upon it!

MR. WHITE. No! (*In great alarm he thrusts the paw back into Morris's hand.*)

SERGEANT. (*Pensively, holding the paw in the palm of his hand.*) Ah! By an

old fakir. He was a very holy man. He'd sat all doubled up in one spot for fifteen years, thinking of things. And he wanted to show that fate ruled people. That everything was cut and dried from the beginning, as you might say. That there wasn't no getting away from it. And that, if you tried to, you caught it hot. (*Pauses solemnly.*) So he put a spell on this bit of a paw. It might have been anything else, but he took the first thing that came handy. Ah! He put a spell on it, and made it so that three people

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(looking at them with deep meaning) could each have three wishes. (All but Mrs. White laugh rather nervously.)

MRS. WHITE. Ssh! Don't!

SERGEANT. (More gravely.) But, but mark you, though the wishes were granted, those three people would have cause to wish they hadn't been.

MR. WHITE. But how could the wishes be granted?

SERGEANT. He didn't say. It would all happen so natural, you might think it a coincidence if so disposed.

HERBERT. Why haven't you tried it, sir?

SERGEANT. (Gravely, after a pause.) I have.

HERBERT. (Eagerly.) You've had your three wishes?

SERGEANT. (Gravely.) Yes.

MRS. WHITE. Were they granted?

SERGEANT. (Staring at the fire.) They were.

(A pause.)

MR. WHITE. Has anybody else wished?

SERGEANT. Yes. The first owner had his three wishes. (Lost in recollection.)

Yes, oh yes, he had his three wishes all right. I don't know what his first

two were, (very impressively) but the third was for death. (All shudder.)

That's how I got the paw.

(A pause.)

HERBERT. (Cheerfully.) Well! Seems to me you've only got to wish for

things that can't have any bad luck about them—

SERGEANT. (Shaking his head.) Ah!

MR. WHITE. (Tentatively.) Morris, if you've had your three wishes, it's no

good to you, now. What do you keep it for?

SERGEANT. (Still holding the paw; looking at it.) Fancy, I suppose, I did have

some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It's done enough mischief

already. Besides, people won't buy. Some of them think it's a fairy tale.

And some want to try it first, and pay after.

(Nervous laugh from the others.)

MRS. WHITE. If you could have another three wishes, would you?

SERGEANT. (Slowly, weighing the paw in his hand and looking at it.) I don't know—I don't know. (Suddenly, with violence, flinging it in the fire.)

Not I'm damned if I would!

(Movement from all.)

MR. WHITE. (Rises and quickly snatches it out of the fire.) What are you doing?

SERGEANT. (Rising and following him and trying to prevent him.) Let it burn! Let the internal thing burn!

MRS. WHITE. (Rises.) Let it burn, Father!

MR. WHITE. (Wiping it on his coat sleeve.) No. If you don't want it, give it to me.

SERGEANT. (Violently.) I won't! I won't! My hands are clear of it. I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me, whatever happens. Here! Pitch it back again.

MR. WHITE. (Stubbornly.) I'm going to keep it. What do you say, Herbert?

HERBERT. (Laughing.) I say, keep it if you want to. Stuff and nonsense, any-how.

MR. WHITE. (Looking at the paw thoughtfully.) Stuff and nonsense. Yes, I wonder—(casually) I wish—(He was going to say some ordinary thing, like "I wish I were certain.")

SERGEANT. (Misunderstanding him; violently.) Stop! Mind what you're doing. That's not the way.

MR. WHITE. What is the way?

MRS. WHITE. (Moving away.) Oh, don't have anything to do with it, John.

SERGEANT. That's what I say, ma'am. But if I wasn't to tell him, he might go wishing something he didn't mean to. You hold it in your right hand, and wish aloud. But I warn you! I warn you!

MRS. WHITE. Sounds like the Arabian Nights. Don't you think you might wish me four pair of hands?

MR. WHITE. (Laughing.) Right you are, Mother! I wish—

SERGEANT. (Pulling his arm down.) Stop it! If you must wish, wish for something sensible. Look here! I can't stand this. Gets on my nerves. Where's my coat? (Goes into alcove.)

(Mr. White crosses to fireplace and carefully puts the paw on the mantel-piece. He is absorbed in it.)

HERBERT. I'm coming your way, to the works, in a minute. Won't you wait?

(Goes up, helps Morris with his coat.)

SERGEANT. (Putting on his coat.) No. I'm all shook up. I want fresh air. I don't want to be here when you wish. And wish you will as soon's my

back's turned. I know. I know. But I've warned you, mind.

MR. WHITE. (Helping him into his coat.) All right, Morris. Don't you fret about us. (Gives him money.) Here.

SERGEANT. (Refusing it.) No, I won't—

MR. WHITE. (Forcing it into his hand.) Yes, you will. (Opens door.)

SERGEANT. (Turning to the room.) Well, good night all. (To White.) Put it

in the fire.

ALL. Good night.

(Exit Sergeant. Mr. White closes door, comes toward fireplace, absorbed

in the paw.)

HERBERT. If there's no more in this than there is in his other stories, we

shan't make much out of it.

MRS. WHITE. Did you give him anything for it, Father?

MR. WHITE. A trifle. He didn't want it, but I made him take it.

MRS. WHITE. There, now! You shouldn't. Throwing your money about.

MR. WHITE. (Looking at the paw which he has picked up again.) I wonder—

HERBERT. What?

MR. WHITE. I wonder whether we hadn't better chuck it in the fire?

HERBERT. (Laughing.) Likely! Why, we're all going to be rich and famous

and happy.

MRS. WHITE. Throw it on the fire, indeed, when you've given money for it!

So like you, Father.

HERBERT. Wish to be an emperor, Father, to begin with. Then you can't be

henpecked!

MRS. WHITE. (Going for him in front of the table with a duster.) You young—!

HERBERT. (Running away from her.) Steady with that duster, Mother!

MR. WHITE. Be quiet, there! (Herbert catches Mrs. White in his arms and

kisses her.) I wonder—(He has the paw in his hand.) I don't know what

to wish for, and that's a fact. (He looks about him with a happy smile.) I

seem to've got it all, all I want.

HERBERT. (With his hands on the old man's shoulders.) Old Dad! If you'd

only cleared the debt on the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you?

(Laughing.) Well, go ahead! Wish for the two hundred pounds; that'll

just do it.

MR. WHITE. (Half laughing.) Shall I?

HERBERT. Go on! Here! I'll play slow music. (Crosses to piano.)

MRS. WHITE. Don't, John. Don't have nothing to do with it!

HERBERT. Now, Dad! (Plays.)

MR. WHITE. I will! (Holds up the paw, as if half ashamed.) I wish for two hun-

dred pounds.



(Crash on the piano. At the same instant Mr. White utters a cry and lets the paw drop.)

MRS. WHITE. } What's the matter?  
HERBERT.

MR. WHITE. (Gazing with horror at the paw.) It moved! As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake.

HERBERT. (Picks up the paw.) Nonsense, Dad. Why it's as stiff as a bone. (Lays it on the mantelpiece.)

MRS. WHITE. Must have been your fancy, Father.

HERBERT. (Laughing.) Well? (Looking round the room.) I don't see the money and I bet I never shall.

MR. WHITE. (Relieved.) Thank goodness, there's no harm done! But it gave me a shock.

HERBERT. Half past eleven. I must get along. I'm on at midnight. We've had quite a merry evening.

MRS. WHITE. I'm off to bed. Don't be late for breakfast, Herbert.

HERBERT. I shall walk home as usual. Does me good. I shall be with you about nine. Don't wait, though.

MRS. WHITE. You know your father never waits.

HERBERT. Good night, Mother. (Kisses her. She lights candle on the dresser, goes up stairs and exits.)

HERBERT. (Coming to his father, who is sunk in thought.) Good night, Dad. You'll find the cash tied up in the middle of the bed.

MRS. WHITE. (Staring, seizes Herbert's hand.) It moved, Herbert.

HERBERT. Ah! And a monkey hanging by his tail from the bed post, watching you count the golden sovereigns.

MR. WHITE. (Accompanying him to the door.) I wish you wouldn't joke, my boy.

HERBERT. All right, Dad. (Opens door.) Gad! What weather! Good night. (Exit.)

(The old man shakes his head, closes the door, locks it, puts the chain up, slips the lower bolt, has some difficulty with the upper bolt.)

MR. WHITE. This bolt's stiff again! I must get Herbert to look to it in the morning.

(Comes into the room, puts out the lamp, crosses towards steps; but is irresistibly attracted towards fireplace. Sits down and stares into the fire. His expression changes; he sees something horrible.)

MR. WHITE. (With an involuntary cry.) Mother! Mother!

MRS. WHITE. (Appearing at the door at the top of the steps with candle.) What's the matter? (Comes down.)

MR. WHITE. (Mastering himself. Rises.) Nothing. I—haha!—I saw faces in the fire.

MRS. WHITE. Come along.

(She takes his arm and draws him towards the steps. He looks back frightened towards the fireplace as they reach the first step.)

# CURTAIN

## SCENE II:

(Bright sunshine. The table, which has been moved nearer the window, is laid for breakfast. Mrs. White busy about the table. Mr. White standing in the window. The inner door is open, showing the outer door.)

MR. WHITE. What a morning Herbert's got for walking home!

MRS. WHITE. What's o'clock? (Looks at clock on mantelpiece.) Quarter to nine. I declare. He's off at eight. (Crosses to fire.)

MR. WHITE. Takes him half an hour to change and wash. He's just by the cemetery now.

MRS. WHITE. He'll be here in ten minutes.

MR. WHITE. (Coming to the table.) What's for breakfast?

MRS. WHITE. Sausages. (At the mantelpiece.) Why, if here isn't that dirty monkey's paw! (Picks it up, looks at it with disgust, puts it back. Takes sausages in dish from before fire and places them on table.) Silly thing! The idea of us listening to such nonsense!

MR. WHITE. (Goes up to window again.) Ay—the Sergeant-Major and his yarns! I suppose all old soldiers are alike—

MRS. WHITE. Come on, Father. Herbert hates us to wait.

(They both sit and begin breakfast.)

MRS. WHITE. How could wishes be granted, nowadays?

MR. WHITE. Ah! Been thinking about it all night, have you?

MRS. WHITE. You kept me awake with your tossing and tumbling—

MR. WHITE. Ay, I had a bad night.

MRS. WHITE. It was the storm, I expect. How it blew!

MR. WHITE. I didn't hear it. I was asleep and not asleep, if you know what I mean.

MRS. WHITE. And all that rubbish about its making you unhappy if your wish was granted! How could two hundred pounds hurt you, eh, Father?

MR. WHITE. Might drop on my head in a lump. Don't see any other way. And I'd try to bear that. Though, mind you, Morris said it would all happen so naturally that you might take it for a coincidence, if so disposed.

MRS. WHITE. Well—it hasn't happened. That's all I know. And it isn't going to. (A letter is seen to drop in the letter-box.) And how you can sit there and talk about it—(Sharp postman's knock; she jumps to her feet.)

What's that?

MR. WHITE. Postman, o'course.

MRS. WHITE. (Seeing the letter from a distance; in an awed whisper.) He's brought a letter, John!

MR. WHITE. (Laughing.) What did you think he'd bring? Ton o'coals?

MRS. WHITE. John—I John—I Suppose—?

MR. WHITE. Suppose what?

MRS. WHITE. Suppose it was two hundred pounds!

MR. WHITE. (Suppressing his excitement.) Eh!—Here! Don't talk nonsense. Why don't you fetch it?

MRS. WHITE. (Crosses and takes letter out of the box.) It's thick, John—(feels it)—and—and it's got something crisp inside it. (Takes letter to White, Right Center)

MR. WHITE. Who—who's it for?

MRS. WHITE. You.

MR. WHITE. Hand it over, then. (Feeling and examining it with ill-concealed excitement.) The ideal! What a superstitious old woman you are! Where are my specs?

MRS. WHITE. Let me open it.

MR. WHITE. Don't you touch it. Where are my specs?

MRS. WHITE. Don't let sudden wealth sour your temper, John.

MR. WHITE. Will you find my specs?

MRS. WHITE. (Taking them off mantelpiece.) Here, John, here.

(As he opens the letter.)

Take care! Don't tear it!

MR. WHITE. Tear what?

MRS. WHITE. If it was banknotes, John!

MR. WHITE. (Taking a thick, formal document out of the envelope and a crisp-looking slip.) You've gone dotty.—You've made me nervous. (Reads.)

"Sir,—Enclosed please find receipt for interest on the mortgage of £200 on your house, duly received."

(They look at each other. Mr. White sits down to finish his breakfast silently. Mrs. White goes to the window.)

MRS. WHITE. That comes of listening to tipsy old soldiers.

MR. WHITE. (Pettish.) What does?

MRS. WHITE. You thought there was banknotes in it.

MR. WHITE. (Injured.) I didn't! I said all along—

MRS. WHITE. How Herbert will laugh, when I tell him!

MR. WHITE. (With gruff good-humor.) You're not going to tell him. You're going to keep your mouth shut. That's what you're going to do. Why, I should never hear the last of it.

MRS. WHITE. Serve you right. I shall tell him. You know you like his fun. See how he joked you last night when you said the paw moved.

(She is looking through the window.)

MR. WHITE. So it did. It did move. That I'll swear to.

MRS. WHITE. (Abstractedly: she is watching something outside.) You thought it did.

MR. WHITE. I say it did. There was no thinking about it. You saw how it upset me, didn't you?

(She doesn't answer.)

Didn't you?—Why don't you listen? (Turns round.) What is it?

MRS. WHITE. Nothing.

MR. WHITE. (Turns back to his breakfast.) Do you see Herbert coming?

MRS. WHITE. No.

MR. WHITE. He's about due. What is it?

MRS. WHITE. Nothing. Only a man. Looks like a gentleman. Leastways, he's in black, and he's got a top-hat on.

MR. WHITE. What about him? (He is not interested; goes on eating.)

MRS. WHITE. He stood at the garden-gate as if he wanted to come in. But he couldn't seem to make up his mind.

MR. WHITE. Oh, go on! You're full o' fancies.

MRS. WHITE. He's going—no; he's coming back.

MR. WHITE. Don't let him see you peeping.

MRS. WHITE. (With increasing excitement.) He's looking at the house. He's got his hand on the latch. No. He turns away again. (Eagerly.) John! He looks like a sort of a lawyer

MRS. WHITE. Oh, you'll only laugh again. But suppose—suppose he's coming about the two hundred—

MR. WHITE. You're not to mention it again!—You're a foolish old woman.— Come and eat your breakfast. (Eagerly.) Where is he now?

MRS. WHITE. Gone down the road. He has turned back. He seems to've made up his mind. Here he comes!—Oh, John, and me all untidy!

(Knock.)

MR. WHITE. (To Mrs. White who is hastily smoothing her hair, etc.) What's it matter? He's made a mistake. Come to the wrong house. (Crosses to fireplace.)

(Mrs. White opens the door. Mr. Sampson, dressed from head to foot in solemn black, with a top-hat, stands in the doorway.)

SAMPSON. (Outside.) Is this Mr. White's?

MRS. WHITE. Come in, sir. Please step in.

(She shows him into the room; he is awkward and nervous.)

You must overlook our being so untidy; and the room all anyhow; and John in his garden-coat. (To Mr. White, reproachfully.) Oh, John.

SAMPSON. (To Mr. White.) Morning. My name is Sampson.

MRS. WHITE. (Offering a chair.) Won't you please be seated?

(Sampson stands quite still.)

SAMPSON. Ah—thank you—no, I think not—I think not. (Pause.)

MR. WHITE. (Awkwardly, trying to help him.) Fine weather for the time o' year.

SAMPSON. Ah—yes—yes— (Pause; he makes a renewed effort.) My name is Sampson—I've come—

MRS. WHITE. Perhaps you was wishful to see Herbert; he'll be home in a minute. (Pointing.) Here's his breakfast waiting—

SAMPSON. (Interrupting her hastily.) No, no! (Pause.) I've come from the electrical works—

MRS. WHITE. Why, you might have come with him.

(Mr. White sees something is wrong, tenderly puts his hand on her arm.)

SAMPSON. No—no—I've come—alone.

MRS. WHITE. (With a little anxiety.) Is anything the matter?

SAMPSON. I was asked to call—

MRS. WHITE. (Abruptly.) Herbert! Has anything happened? Is he hurt? Is he hurt?

MR. WHITE. (Soothing her.) There, there, Mother. Don't you jump to con-

clusions. Let the gentleman speak. You've not brought bad news, I'm

SAMPSON. I'm—sorry—

MRS. WHITE. Is he hurt?

(Sampson bows.)

MRS. WHITE. Badly?

SAMPSON. Very badly. (Turns away.)

MRS. WHITE. (With a cry.) John—! (She instinctively moves towards White.)

SAMPSON. He is not in pain.

MRS. WHITE. Oh, thank God! Thank God for that! Thank— (She looks in a startled fashion at Mr. White—realizes what Sampson means, catches his arm and tries to turn him towards her.) Do you mean—?

(Sampson avoids her look; she gropes for her husband; he takes her two hands in his, and gently lets her sink into the armchair above the fireplace, then he stands on her right, between her and Sampson.)

MRS. WHITE. (Hoarsely.) Go on, sir.

SAMPSON. He was telling his mates a story. Something that had happened here last night. He was laughing, and wasn't noticing and—and— (hushed) the machinery caught him—

(A little cry from Mrs. White, her face shows her horror and agony.)

MRS. WHITE. (Vague, holding Mrs. White's hand.) The machinery caught him—yes—and him the only child—it's hard, sir—very hard—

SAMPSON. (Subdued.) The Company wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss—

MRS. WHITE. (Staring blankly.) Our—great—loss—!

SAMPSON. I was to say further—(as if apologizing) I am only their servant—I am only obeying orders—

MRS. WHITE. Our—great—loss—

SAMPSON. (Laying an envelope on the table and edging towards the door.) I was to say, the Company disclaims all responsibility, but, in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation. (Gets to door.)

MRS. WHITE. Our—great—loss— (Suddenly, with horror.) How—how much? SAMPSON. (In the doorway.) Two hundred pounds.

(Exit.)

(Mrs. White gives a cry. The old man takes no heed of her, smiles faintly, puts out his hands like a sightless man, and drops, a senseless heap, to the floor. Mrs. White stares at him blankly and her hands go out helplessly towards him.)

# CURTAIN

## SCENE III:

(Night. On the table a candle is flickering its last gasp. The room looks neglected. Mr. White is dozing fitfully in the armchair. Mrs. White is in the window peering through the blind.)

(Mr. White starts, wakes, looks around him.)

MR. WHITE. (Freely.) Jenny—Jenny.

MRS. WHITE. (In the window.) Yes.

MR. WHITE. Where are you?

MRS. WHITE. At the window.

MR. WHITE. What are you doing?

MRS. WHITE. Looking up the road.

MR. WHITE. (Falling back.) What's the use, Jenny? What's the use?

MRS. WHITE. That's where the cemetery is; that's where we've laid him.

MR. WHITE. Ay—ay—a week today—what o'clock is it?

MRS. WHITE. I don't know.

MR. WHITE. We don't take much account of time now, Jenny, do we?

MRS. WHITE. Why should we? He don't come home. He'll never come home again.

MR. WHITE. There's nothing to think about—

MR. WHITE. Or to talk about. (Pause.) Come away from the window; you'll get cold.

MRS. WHITE. It's colder where he is.

MR. WHITE. Ay—gone forever—

MRS. WHITE. And taken all our hopes with him—

MR. WHITE. And all our wishes—

MRS. WHITE. Ay, and all our— (With a sudden cry.) John!

(She comes quickly to him; he rises.)

MR. WHITE. Jenny! What's the matter?

MRS. WHITE. (With dreadful eagerness.) The paw! The monkey's paw!

MR. WHITE. (Bewildered.) Where? Where is it? What's wrong with it?

MRS. WHITE. I want it! You haven't done away with it?

MR. WHITE. I haven't seen it—since—why?

MRS. WHITE. I want it! Find it! Find it!

MR. WHITE. (Groping on the mantelpiece.) Here! Here it is! What do you want of it? (He leaves it there.)

MRS. WHITE. Why didn't I think of it? Why didn't you think of it?

MR. WHITE. Think of what?

MRS. WHITE. The other two wishes!

MR. WHITE. (With horror.) What?

MRS. WHITE. We've only had one.

MR. WHITE. (Tragically.) Wasn't that enough?

MRS. WHITE. No! We'll have one more. (White crosses to Right Center. Mrs. White takes the paw and follows him.) Take it. Take it quickly. And wish—

MR. WHITE. (Avoiding the paw.) Wish what?

MRS. WHITE. Oh, John! John! Wish our boy alive again!

MR. WHITE. Jenny! Are you mad?

MRS. WHITE. Take it. Take it and wish. (With an outburst of grief.) Oh; my boy! My boy!

MR. WHITE. Get to bed. Get to sleep. You don't know what you're saying.

MRS. WHITE. We had the first wish granted—why not the second?

MR. WHITE. (Hushed.) He's been dead ten days, and—Jenny! Jenny! I only knew him by his clothing—if you wasn't allowed to see him then—how could you bear to see him now?

MRS. WHITE. I don't care. Bring him back.

MR. WHITE. (Shrinking from the paw.) I daren't touch it!

MRS. WHITE. (Thrusting it in his hand.) Here! Here! Here!

MR. WHITE. (Trembling.) Jenny!

MRS. WHITE. (Fiercely.) Wish. (She goes on frantically whispering "Wish.")

MR. WHITE. (Shuddering, but overcome by her insistence.) I—I—wish—my son—alive again.

(He drops it with a cry. The candle goes out. Utter darkness. He sinks in to a chair. Mrs. White hurries to the window and draws the blind back. She stands in the moonlight. Pause.)

MRS. WHITE. (Dreadfully.) Nothing.

MR. WHITE. Thank goodness!



thing. (Closes blind.) And nothing, nothing, nothing left in our lives, John.

MR. WHITE. Except each other, Jenny—and memories.

MRS. WHITE. (Coming back slowly to the fireplace.) We're too old. We were only alive in him. We can't begin again. We can't feel anything now, John, but emptiness and darkness. (She sinks into armchair.)

MR. WHITE. Tisn't for long, Jenny. There's that to look forward to. Every minute's long, now.

MR. WHITE. (Rising.) I can't bear the darkness!

MRS. WHITE. It's dreary—dreary.

MR. WHITE. (Crosses to dresser.) Where's the candle? (Finds it and brings it to table.) And the matches? Where are the matches? We mustn't sit in the dark. Tisn't wholesome. (Lights match; the other candlestick is close to him.) There. (Turning with the lighted match towards Mrs. White, who is rocking and moaning.) Don't take on so, Mother.

MRS. WHITE. I'm a mother no longer.

MR. WHITE. (Lights candle.) There now; there now. Go on up to bed. Go on, now—I'm coming.

MRS. WHITE. Whether I'm here or in bed, or wherever I am, I'm with my boy, I'm with—

(A low single knock at the street door.)

MRS. WHITE. (Starting.) What's that!

MR. WHITE. (Mastering his horror.) A rat. The house is full of 'em.

(A louder single knock; she starts up. He catches her by the arm.)

Stop! What are you going to do?

MRS. WHITE. (Wildly.) It's my boy! It's Herbert! I forgot it was a mile away! What are you holding me for? I must open the door!

(The knocking continues in single knocks at irregular intervals, constantly growing louder and more insistent.)

MR. WHITE. (Still holding her.) Jenny, for the love of—!

MRS. WHITE. (Struggling.) Let me go!

MR. WHITE. Don't open the door!

(He drags her Up Right.)

MRS. WHITE. Let me go!

MR. WHITE. Think what you might see!

MRS. WHITE. (Struggling fiercely.) Do you think I fear the child I bore! Let me

go! (She wrenches herself loose and rushes to the door which she tear open.) I'm coming, Herbert! I'm coming!  
 MR. WHITE. (Cowering in the extreme corner Up Left.) Don't do it! Don't do it!

(Mrs. White is at work on the outer door, where the knocking still continues. She slips the chain, slips the lower bolt, unlocks the door.)  
 MR. WHITE. (Suddenly.) The paw! Where's the monkey's paw?  
 (He gets on his knees and feels along the floor for it.)

MRS. WHITE. (Tugging at the top bolt.) John! The top bolt's stuck. I can't move it. Come and help. Quick!  
 MR. WHITE. (Wildly groping.) The paw! There's a wish left.  
 (The knocking is now loud, and in groups of increasing length between the speeches.)

MRS. WHITE. Do you hear him? John! Your child's knocking!  
 MR. WHITE. Where is it! Where did it fall?  
 MRS. WHITE. (Tugging desperately at the bolt.) Help! Help! Will you keep your child from his home?

MR. WHITE. Where did it fall? I can't find it—I can't find—  
 (The knocking is now thunderous, and there are blows upon the door as of a body beating against it.)

MRS. WHITE. Herbert! Herbert! My boy! Wait! Your mother's opening to you! Ah! It's moving! It's moving!  
 MR. WHITE. Heaven forbid! (Finds the paw.) Ah!

MRS. WHITE. (Slipping the bolt.) Herbert!  
 MR. WHITE. (Has raised himself to his knees; he holds the paw high.) I wish him dead. (The knocking stops abruptly.) I wish him dead and at peace!

MRS. WHITE. (Flinging the door open simultaneously.) Herb—  
 (A flood of moonlight. Emptiness. The old man sways in prayer on his knees. The old woman lies half swooning, wailing against the door-post.)

## Looking into the Plot

### 1. Arrange these incidents in the order in which they occur in the story.

- (a) Mr. White takes the monkey's paw and makes his first wish.
- (b) Mr. Sampson tells the Whites of Herbert's accidental death.
- (c) The Sergeant shows the monkey's paw to the Whites.
- (d) Herbert knocks at the door of his parents' home.
- (e) The Sergeant-Major knocks at the Whites' door.
- (f) Mr. White uses his last wish to return Herbert to his grave.
2. How many people could use the paw's magic power? How many wishes could each be granted?
3. What was the final wish of the first person ever to use the paw?
4. What does the Sergeant say when Mrs. White asks him whether he would take three more wishes if he had the chance?
5. How does the 200 pounds come to the Whites? Who brings it? Why?

## Thinking It Through

1. Early in the play certain events occur which are strangely paralleled later on. What do the following incidents foreshadow?
  - (a) Sergeant-Major Morris enters the Whites' house after repeated, loud knocking at the door.
  - (b) The first owner of the paw wished for death on his third wish.
2. You will recall that *dramatic irony* is a tool the playwright uses to heighten the tension in the play by having a character say something that is much more important than she or he realizes at the time.
 

Name the speaker of each of the following lines, and tell why the statement is ironic:

  - (a) "I've got to keep a cool head, a steady eye, and a still hand. The fly wheel might gobble me up." (Scene I)
  - (b) "I don't see the money and I bet I never shall." (Scene I)
  - (c) "Takes him half an hour to change and wash. He's just by the cemetery now." (Scene II)
3. Herbert is not disturbed by the Sergeant's hints of doom. He says, "You've only got to wish for things that can't have any bad luck." The Sergeant shakes his head and says, "Ah!" What is the Sergeant thinking?
4. The Sergeant-Major says he received the paw from a holy man who "wanted to show that fate ruled people." Do you think what happened to

- the Whites proved that the holy man was correct? What do you think responsible for Herbert's death?
5. What is Mr. White's final wish? Why?

## Building Vocabulary

The following sentences are based on the play. Decide which of the following the sentences best fits each blank. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The Sergeant says of the paw, "Let the \_\_\_\_\_ thing buy
2. The Sergeant, remembering how he first got the monkey's paw, spoke \_\_\_\_\_ of his experiences.
3. Mr. White sees something horrible in the fire and gives an \_\_\_\_\_ cry.
4. Mr. White tries to \_\_\_\_\_ Herbert's attention from the chess game.
5. An air of comfort \_\_\_\_\_ the room, with its old-fashioned armchairs and cheerful fireplace.

pervades      pensively      infernal  
distract      involuntary      spell

## Writing Projects

1. Pretend that you are Sergeant-Major Morris. Write a letter to an old army buddy telling him what happened to the White family. Use the list of events as you arranged them in "Looking into the Plot" (page 137). Be sure to include the Sergeant-Major's feelings and opinions in your narrative. (For help with this assignment see *Writing Manual*, p. 202.)
2. When W. W. Jacobs wrote the short story "The Monkey's Paw" (on which this play is based), he gave his own twist to an old tale of three wishes. The classic version, a poor old couple is granted three wishes. The wastes the first wish on a new cooking pot. Her angry husband then wishes that the pot were stuck on her head, and, finally, the third wish